

AIR WAR COLLEGE

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THE LONG FIGHT:
LESSONS FROM THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE WEHRMACHT'S
HEER

by

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Biography

LTC Jeff Mozingo is currently assigned as a student at the Air War College, Air University, Maxwell AFB, AL. He began his Army career as an enlisted soldier in 1990, serving as a military transportation specialist. In 1997, he graduated from East Carolina University with a BA in History and was commissioned as a Transportation Officer through the US Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps. He served four years in the active component before transitioning to the US Army Reserve Active Guard Reserve program, where he continues to serve as a Logistics Officer. LTC Mozingo's duties as a commissioned officer have ranged from platoon leader in the 97th Transportation Company (Heavy Boat) to a recent assignment as Chief of Force Generation in the US Army Reserve Command G35 Directorate. His military education includes the US Army's Transportation Officer Basic Course, Combined Logistics Officer Captain's Career Course, Combined Arms and Services Staff School, and Command and General Staff College.

Abstract

Since the founding of our nation, our Army has learned from the Prussian and German armies. That was particularly true after both of the World Wars. Today, we tell ourselves that the United States Army is the most powerful and professional army the world has ever known. Still, we rightfully continue to seek ways to maintain and improve our professionalism and proficiency; this is an ongoing process, with lessons being learned and relearned as our Army adapts to ever-changing internal and external environments. The intent of this paper is to examine some of the strengths and weaknesses of the German Army as it entered World War II to gain insights to aid current efforts to improve the US Army. The central thesis of this paper argues that the military effectiveness of the German Army at the beginning of World War II resulted from an historical emphasis on maneuver warfare that was enabled by the combination of a decentralized command philosophy, a corresponding emphasis on leader development, and supporting organizational elements within the Army. Beyond the strengths manifested by the German Army, this paper also explores some of the strategic, operational, and ethical failures it demonstrated. The paper concludes with a discussion of what the US Army today might still learn from the German experience to enhance its own efforts to overcome the warfighting challenge of improving soldier, leader, and team performance.

Introduction

In the first half of the 20th century Germany fought as the single-most dominant member of an alliance in each of the two largest military conflicts the world has ever known. During both world wars it took the combined might of the majority of the other world powers to subdue Germany and its allies. In August 1914 Germany entered World War I by launching a massive ground offensive against its western neighbor, France. After four years, Germany's leaders surrendered under the weight of allied manpower and material superiority.¹ The peace agreements ending World War I limited the German Army to 100,000 soldiers, with no more than 4,000 officers and no tanks or planes.² Just over twenty years later, despite the Treaty of Versailles' limitations, Germany had rearmed and launched World War II with what has been described as "quite likely the finest military machine in history,"³ whose achievements in the first years of the war "stand at the pinnacle of the modern military art."⁴ Six years later, that even more powerful German Army, and the nation as a whole, fell to a far more devastating defeat than that of the first world war.

Several questions arise from even such a brief history review. First, how after its defeat in World War I, did the interwar German Army develop the soldier, leader, and organizational proficiency that enabled so much operational success during the early phases of World War II? Second, if the German Army was so exceptional going into the second war, why did it again lose? Finally, what difference does any of this make to today's military professionals, particularly those in the current US Army? This paper provides some answers to those questions.

To address the first question, the central thesis of this paper argues that the military effectiveness of the German army at the beginning of World War II resulted from an historical emphasis on maneuver warfare that was enabled by the combination of a decentralized command

philosophy, a corresponding emphasis on leader development, and supporting organizational elements within the army. This section of the paper will provide an historical overview of the rationale and some of the key leaders driving Germany to focus on maneuver warfare. It will also consider the underlying command philosophy that developed along with that emphasis on mobile war. Next, it will highlight the roles, selection, education, and training of leaders within the German Army. Lastly, this section will discuss how organizational elements, such as the General Staff and unit associations, contributed to continuity and cohesion in ways that supported the Army's predilection for mobile warfare.

Beyond the strengths manifested by the German Army, this paper will also consider some of its weaknesses. Explaining the loss of a powerful military is important, but it is not the only cause for concern; even victorious armies can suffer from serious problems. This section of the paper will explore some of the strategic and operational failures demonstrated by the Germans. It will also touch on the moral deficiencies of the Army, as those contributed to the military losses and led to horrible war crimes, the responsibility for which the German military and civilian society still grapple to this day.

The concluding section of the paper will address what this all means for the US Army today. Certainly, our army is not the *Reichsheer* or the *Wehrmacht's Heer*, nor should it try to be. Obvious differences exist in geopolitical situations, time periods, the countries' military and civilian cultures, and available technology and other resources. However, when a military achieves the high level of effectiveness demonstrated by the Germans in World War II, it is reasonable to consider how they did so. The final section of the paper will, therefore, seek to demonstrate what the US Army might still learn from the German experience to enhance its own

efforts to overcome the warfighting challenge of improving soldier, leader, and team performance.

Before moving to the main body of the paper, it is important to emphasize what this paper is not. It is not a comprehensive study of World War II, the German military, or even the German Army. Those topics are too broad, and they have been exhaustively studied. Rather, this paper attempts a necessarily limited examination of the German Army to glean relevant applications for the US Army, particularly in the areas of leader and team development. This work certainly does not aim to glorify the World War II German Army or Nazi politics or ideology. In fact the negative lessons to be learned from those topics are as clear as any positive applications. Again, the intent of this paper is to examine some of the strengths and weaknesses of the German Army as it entered World War II to seek insights that might aid current efforts to improve the US Army.

German Army Analysis

The early German victories in World War II may have shocked the world, but the Army that was the primary source of those successes was not necessarily something entirely new; rather it reflected a great deal of continuity with Germany's military history. Harkening back to the Kingdom of Prussia, and then the unified Germany that followed, the Army demonstrated a distinct penchant for an aggressive, mobile form of warfare. One reason often given for this is the geo-strategic position the nation occupies.⁵ Situated in central Europe, Germany has few natural barriers to impede the advance of hostile land forces.⁶ Indeed, "by the eighteenth century, armies from virtually all of the major European powers, Sweden, France, England, and Russia, engaged in fighting on German territory."⁷ By the interwar period, Germany still faced potential threats in the form of powerful rivals from the past, France to the west and the Soviet Union to

the east. Poland and Czechoslovakia provided a buffer between Germany and the Soviet Union; however, German military leaders also viewed those countries as threats.⁸ Faced with the potential for a multi-front war against powerful enemies whose resources rivaled or exceeded their own, German military leaders sought ways to rapidly mobilize and decisively defeat one opponent so they could then turn their attention to fight another.⁹

German military history shows a continuous evolution of this concept of aggressive, mobile warfare. Prussian King Frederick the Great set the example for his successors when he invaded “Silesia without warning in 1740, [and] gave Europe a taste of what later was to be called blitzkrieg.”¹⁰ Frederick preferred short wars, with battlefield victories secured through rapid deployment and flanking attacks executed by his strictly disciplined, professional army.¹¹ Following Frederick’s death, Prussia proved unable to resist the highly mobile army of another military genius, Napoleon Bonaparte, resulting in devastating losses at Jena and Auerstädt in 1806.¹² Later Prussian military leaders, such as Gerhard von Scharnhorst, initiated reforms that paved the way for the Army to regain its mobility and lethality. Scharnhorst helped secure the implementation of conscription to grow the Prussian Army, and he sought to develop the strengths of the individual soldier rather than simply rely on the rigid discipline characteristic of Frederick’s Army.¹³ Recognizing the leadership challenges of controlling this growing Army, Scharnhorst strengthened the role of the General Staff as a planning body and improved the military schools system to educate officers.¹⁴

Appointed chief of the Prussian Army’s General Staff in 1857, Helmuth von Moltke the Elder played a key role in the development of the Army as it moved into the modern era. Moltke built on the reforms instituted in the early 19th century to further improve the Army’s ability to conduct mobile warfare. He “expanded the Prussian General Staff and extended its influence,”

with various sections responsible for war plans, mobilization and transportation planning, intelligence estimates, historical studies, and officer education and training.¹⁵ Recognizing the ability of rail to quickly move armies over long distances, Moltke included rail movement planning into war plans, and he “introduced transport exercises as part of the General Staff and force exercises.”¹⁶ To overcome the uncertainties of war and better facilitate the direction of a large force operating over wide areas, Moltke institutionalized the “mission-type command and control system that had become practice in the General Staff since the days of Scharnhorst and Gneisenau,” providing subordinate commanders the freedom “to react rapidly and flexibly to unforeseen events.”¹⁷ All of these actions supported Moltke’s preferred way of fighting: quickly mobilizing and moving his Army in separate elements to conduct a concentric attack to envelope and defeat his enemy in a *Kesselschlacht*, or cauldron battle.¹⁸ Moltke’s efforts led to battlefield successes that combined with the political maneuverings of Otto von Bismark around the middle of the 19th century to create a unified Germany.¹⁹ His work, therefore, firmly set the direction for the formation of the modern German Army.

Though World War I is often remembered for static, trench warfare, that depiction is not consistent with German military thought during the period. Around the time of his retirement as chief of the General Staff, Alfred von Schlieffen provided his successor, Helmuth von Moltke the Younger, a memorandum that outlined “a campaign for a war against France.”²⁰ Exploring the debate over how much of the “Schlieffen Plan” that was executed in 1914 actually reflected Schlieffen’s views or Moltke the Younger’s adjustments is beyond the scope of this paper. What is clear is that the rapid mobilization and sweeping invasion to defeat France, as well as any subsequent plans to then turn and launch an attack against Russia, are consistent with Germany’s historical tendency to fight fast, mobile wars. As one historian has characterized the German

intent to fight and win quickly, “[a]lone among the great powers, mobilization for Germany equalled (sic) war.”²¹ Even after the German attack stalled and the lines solidified, the push for mobility did not cease. The Germans achieved some success at Riga and Caporetto with “the debut of a new German tactical approach...*Stosstrupp* (shock troop or storm troop) tactics.”²² This involved the secret massing and training of forces to assault enemy lines, “spearheaded by...independent squads, highly trained and armed with a full variety of modern support weapons...to find and infiltrate through weak spots in the defense, bypassing all obstacles and leaving them for the follow-up waves of regular infantry, moving constantly forward.”²³ These tactics highlighted the continued importance of flexibility, mobility, and decentralization of command, even down to the lowest level – the infantry squad.²⁴

Having lost what was ultimately a war of attrition, the German Army spent the interwar period developing the capability to restore mobility to the battlefield. Serving first as the chief of staff of the *Truppenamt* (Troop Office), and then longer as the chief of the Army Command from 1919 to 1926, Hans von Seeckt “played a decisive role in the buildup and orientation of the new *Reichsheer*.”²⁵ In keeping with much of German military tradition, Seeckt “advocated mobile, operational warfare.”²⁶ To develop the ability of the *Reichsheer* to fight such a war, Seeckt demanded training that promoted “physical fitness, youthful enthusiasm” and initiative, and combined arms proficiency.²⁷ Though he does seem to have looked forward to the day when the Treaty of Versailles’ restrictions would be removed and the Army would grow, he certainly preferred – and went about designing – a small, professional Army over the massive, untrained and immobile conscript armies of World War I.²⁸ Indeed, many of Seeckt’s actions directly circumvented the treaty’s provisions to enable the formation of the Army he envisioned. For example, though the General Staff had been forbidden because it was seen as “a font of Prussian

militarism as well as a formidable planning organ,” Seeckt essentially maintained the organization under the new name of *Truppenamt*, or Troop Office.²⁹ With combined arms maneuver being key to his vision of warfare, Seeckt found ways to incorporate armor and aviation into the training of his Army: he coordinated for German personnel to attend tank and aviation training in the Soviet Union, and he ensured simulated or dummy tanks and aircraft were included in unit maneuvers.³⁰ As one historian noted, Seeckt “rebuilt the army...and...imbued it with a spirit of movement and attack.”³¹

When Adolf Hitler directed the rearmament of Germany in 1935, the transition of the Army from Seeckt’s *Reichsheer* to the *Heer* of the *Wehrmacht* was a relatively smooth, almost natural next step. Fundamentally, the Army had already been preparing for rearmament during the Weimar period; Hitler simply hastened the procurement of equipment.³² Having extensively trained on combined arms maneuver throughout the interwar period, the Army could openly test and incorporate air and armor once the Treaty of Versailles restrictions were officially rejected.³³ This ultimately led to the development of the panzer divisions, seen by some as “the most important innovation in the interwar period.”³⁴ In many ways, these units might be seen as a fulfillment of the World War I Stormtroopers concept, able to achieve rapid, deep penetrations and conduct massive envelopments of enemy forces. Though the Army still relied on the mission type command system preferred since before Moltke the Elder’s time, advances in radio technology now allowed units to better coordinate their operations over a broader, even more dynamic battlefield.³⁵ No major change in doctrine was necessary when Ludwig Beck became chief of the *Truppenamt* in 1933 and published regulations that would guide the *Heer* during World War II; those documents expressed many of the concepts described in Seeckt’s manuals: “simplicity of orders,” flexibility, combined arms maneuver, initiative and decisive action, and

strong, bold leadership.³⁶ As desired by both Seeckt and Beck, the well-trained, professional *Reichswehr* served as a good cadre to receive, train, and integrate the larger population of the *Heer*. Due to the limitations imposed by the Treaty of Versailles, Seeckt was able to be very selective in appointing officers in the *Reichsheer*; his decision to fill those positions mostly with prior General Staff officers and his emphasis on leader training gave the *Heer* an especially competent and coherent body of leaders to build upon.³⁷ Finally, because the General Staff and the War Academy, both of which will be discussed in further detail later, had basically been maintained as the Troop Office and the 3rd Infantry Division Officer School, it was easy to restore them to full functionality as planning and educational institutions when rearmament was announced.³⁸ The *Heer*'s mechanized units, operating with close air support, reflected the use of technology to achieve the *Bewegungskrieg*, or war of movement, the Germans had always sought.³⁹ As has been alluded to, the use of those tools was undergirded by other important aspects of the German military that had also developed over time; the first of these was their command philosophy.

The command philosophy developed by the Germans over the years both supported their concept of mobile warfare and strengthened the Army as an institution. While the name for this philosophy, *Auftragstaktik*, has been translated numerous ways, this paper will henceforth use the term mission command.⁴⁰ Basically, this system entailed a senior commanders assigning a mission and describing their overall intent to a subordinate using clear, concise orders and then expecting the subordinate to plan and execute that mission as he saw fit in keeping with the stated intent.⁴¹ It is important to understand that mission command is more than “a technique to issue orders...it is a command philosophy. The basic concept of *Auftragstaktik* means that there is direction by the superior but no tight control.”⁴² When this type of command first became

standard practice in the 19th century Prussian Army, it was primarily used at the higher command levels, but historians tell us it “was integrated into all levels of command in the German Army over next few decades.”⁴³ Mission command facilitated decentralized execution and provided subordinates with the flexibility they needed when facing a thinking enemy and dealing with changing conditions in combat. It allowed them to make the rapid decisions and take the necessary actions to seize and maintain the initiative and momentum while operating across increasingly large battlefields and areas of operation. Mission command required three things: two-way trust between superior and subordinate, the subordinate being given and accepting responsibility – along with the corresponding authority – and initiative being encouraged in and exercised by the subordinate.⁴⁴ The German Army was very good at developing leaders and the overall organization to foster these attributes.

The German method for producing officers aligned well with their concepts of *Bewegungskrieg* and mission command, and therefore contributed significantly to the Army’s battlefield successes. First, German officers were valued as leaders. They occupied a prestigious place in society, and though the quality of officers might have dropped with the growth in numbers during rearmament, at least from an educational standpoint, “these men still constituted the *crème de la crème* of their society at that time.”⁴⁵ Within the military itself, strong emphasis was placed on the role of officers as leaders of men in combat. Officers were expected to be the primary trainers of their soldiers, with NCOs serving to assist.⁴⁶ While the Prussian tradition of discipline remained important, it was tempered with an emphasis on the value of the individual which had also long been important to the Army since the times of Scharnhorst. Rather than being aloof or harsh, officers were expected to have close, caring relationships with their men.⁴⁷ They shared the soldiers’ hardships, set the example for them to follow, and led them into

battle.⁴⁸ Prior to their disbandment in the 1920's, cadet schools had informed their young pupils "that they were there to learn how to die and this attitude of dying heroically on the battlefield was deeply rooted in the German officer corps."⁴⁹ As World War II progressed, the emphasis on frontline leadership grew, with promotions being tied increasingly to time spent at the front.⁵⁰ The point is that the German concept of the role of the officer allowed the Army access to some of the best qualified men society had to offer, ensured an aggressive style of leadership, and created cohesion and the willingness on the part of soldiers to follow those officers.

Second, the German system for commissioning officers also provided for an exceptional level of combat leadership. Selection for and successful completion of the pre-commissioning schools required officer aspirants to display both intellectual ability and, more importantly, character.⁵¹ However, school house training alone did not qualify one to become an officer; a significant amount of time was first required serving with troops in a regiment.⁵² Finally, having passed the education and training requirements, an applicant still needed the concurrence of his regimental commander, who rendered an assessment on his suitability to become an officer before he could be commissioned. This system produced new officers who possessed the demonstrated leadership abilities, intellectual capacity, tactical skills, and experience to be placed in charge of soldiers.

The German Army also maintained an effective education system for producing officers to conduct its form of mobile warfare. Many of the senior officers that developed and led the Army into World War II had been educated as children in cadet schools which provided both civilian and military coursework.⁵³ In the 1930's, the Army began coordinating with various civilian groups to encourage military oriented training – such as athletics, marksmanship, and land navigation – for the nation's youth.⁵⁴ Both the earlier cadet schools and the later youth

training programs provided a significant segment of society familiar with and perhaps more supportive of the military, and they also created a pool of potential soldiers already possessing some of the basic skills needed for military life. Prior to a young man being commissioned as an officer, he attended *Kriegsschule*, usually after serving a while in a regiment to familiarize him with troops and to allow evaluation of his leadership ability.⁵⁵

Formal education for commissioned officers was primarily conducted at the *Kriegsakademie*, an institution that had been very important to the German Army at least since the times of Moltke the Elder.⁵⁶ Under Seeckt, the basic function of this academy was preserved in the *Reichswehr* and continued with the reestablishment of the school during rearmament. Over time, the length of attendance varied, but the academy remained a fairly consistent and effective venue to train young officers in the rank of first lieutenant to captain.⁵⁷ Attendance was competitive, with selection determined by scores on a comprehensive entrance exam as well as recommendation from the officer's regimental commander.⁵⁸ Consistent with his emphasis on officer education, Seeckt made taking the entrance exam mandatory for all officers during his tenure as Army chief.⁵⁹ Top performers at the academy were allowed to become members of the prestigious General Staff.⁶⁰ Though not all officers were able to attend the academy, those who studied to take the exam as well as those who actually attended the academy were expected to share the gained knowledge with their fellow officers.⁶¹ The curriculum at the academy focused primarily on tactics and operations,⁶² with classes taught by instructors rotated in from among the Army's highest-performing, experienced officers; teaching at the academy was considered a positive thing.⁶³ The method of academy instruction encouraged creativity and initiative in the students; instructors and students interacted in a relaxed, almost friendly manner, and student solutions to exercise problems received as much consideration as any proposed school answers.⁶⁴

Beyond the *Kriegsakademie*, there was no formal education for officers, but the Army provided many other venues for them to learn. The Army made extensive use of wargames to train commanders and staffs, with junior officers often required to fill roles senior to their current rank to develop their ability to perform at higher levels.⁶⁵ The Army used field maneuvers with real and notional units, incorporating simulated armor and aircraft when necessary, to train units and leaders.⁶⁶ To facilitate the wargames and maneuvers, the Germans employed a cadre of trained umpires to ensure the events remained realistic, maintained the proper tempo, and achieved their goals.⁶⁷ Staff rides were conducted by the Army chief as a means to train General Staff officers and senior Army commanders.⁶⁸ At the end of these wargames, maneuvers, and staff rides, leadership conducted thorough after action reviews to assist with the training of the participants and capture lessons for the future.⁶⁹ These training venues served more than just to educate individual leaders, as important as that was; the Army also used them to develop doctrine and test war plans.⁷⁰

Indeed, in many ways the German Army proved to be an effective learning organization. As has already been described, the development of the *Heer*'s form of mechanized warfare reflected the evolution of tactics and operations that built on past experiences to achieve the type of mobile warfare the Germans had long desired, and the Army continued to seek ways to learn and improve. For example, though much of the world was shocked and impressed by Germany's rapid victory over Poland in 1939, the Army conducted honest self-assessments and delayed the invasion of France while it worked to correct the noted deficiencies, resulting in an even more impressive achievement in 1940.⁷¹ The effectiveness of the German Army was certainly aided by its consistent efforts through the interwar period to promote learning, beginning at the individual level and permeating the organization.

While the German command philosophy and education system emphasized flexibility and individualism, structural elements within the Army ensured a great deal of coherence and cohesion. The General Staff was one such institution. This body served as the primary planning element for the Army high command. Beyond that, it also conducted historical studies and assessments, and it was responsible for planning and oversight of officer education.⁷² As the General Staff was made up of high-performing *Kriegsakademie* graduates, and owing to the prestige and advanced promotion prospects afforded to its members, the body garnered some of the most talented men the Army had to offer.⁷³ In addition to serving in the General Staff headquarters, many officers also rotated through assignments as chief of staff and operations officer at division and higher headquarters.⁷⁴ The chief of staff served as primary advisor to the unit commander under a “joint command” concept utilized by the Army.⁷⁵ Under this construct, though the commander ultimately had final say, he was expected to make decisions in coordination with his chief of staff.⁷⁶ The chief of staff had a responsibility to make known any significant disagreements he might have with the commander’s choices. If the issue was not resolved, the chief of staff had the option to raise the issue to his counterpart at the next higher headquarters who could then consult with his own commander to reign in the subordinate commander if his actions were found to be inappropriate.⁷⁷ Though the ability of the chief of staff to record and elevate disagreements with his commander was limited by guidance published in 1938, the idea of joint command remained strongly ingrained in the officer corps.⁷⁸ Essentially, the General Staff provided a pool of well-educated officers to promote learning and creativity while at the same time providing a certain level of standardization in education, planning, and operations throughout the Army.

The organization of the Army also enhanced its effectiveness. Typically, units at division level and below were affiliated with and recruited from distinct regions.⁷⁹ Additionally, divisions in the Field Army were supported by dedicated units in the Replacement Army, with commanders of both responsible for maintaining close coordination and routinely exchanging junior leaders and trainers with their affiliated unit.⁸⁰ These organizational peculiarities provided practical benefits. The men within units had a common background and shared experiences, and some very likely had established long-term relationships with one another. There were similarly strong bonds between units serving at the front and the supporting units that trained and provided their replacement personnel. The cohesion promoted by this system undoubtedly strengthened the Army as an organization.

Though the *Heer* exhibited numerous strengths, it also suffered from notable deficiencies. It demonstrated widespread moral failure. Hitler is rightly remembered as an evil man who waged a war that involved both the deliberate murder of millions of innocents and untold numbers of atrocities committed against civilian populations and opposing militaries alike. However, Hitler did not commit these acts alone; the Army allowed itself to be the primary tool to prosecute that war and commit many of those horrible acts. When in 1934 all officers were required to make an oath of loyalty to Hitler, his influence and that of his party was enhanced throughout the Army's leadership at all levels.⁸¹ By the start of the war, many of the junior officers had grown up being educated with Nazi ideology.⁸² As the conflict became increasingly long and brutal in the east, the Nazis took advantage of the close ties between the young officers and their soldiers to spread their propaganda as a source of motivation for the Army.⁸³ Though the Army did field chaplains with the troops, it appears they were increasingly marginalized as the Nazis used their own ideology to meet the spiritual needs of the men.⁸⁴ The very senior levels

of command suffered from a high degree of corruption. Many of the senior officers originally cooperated with the Nazis as a means to achieve their goals of rebuilding the military.⁸⁵ As Hitler consolidated his own power, however, he was able to remove or at least marginalize any chance for opposition by placing in authority senior officers who were committed Nazis and/or who were willing to accept bribes for compliance.⁸⁶ Additionally, Hitler's actions created higher level command rivalries, particularly a power struggle between the Army General Staff and the *Wehrmacht's* staff, which would limit the type of joint coordination necessary for strategic and operational success.⁸⁷

Regardless of the Army's many capabilities, ultimately it suffered from a general lack of strategic foresight. This is perhaps not entirely surprising, given the Army's focus on tactical and operational education. Both rearmament and wartime military operations were out of step with the country's economic and industrial capabilities. The military buildup has been criticized for proceeding too fast, such that the Army had to be used before it was fully ready in order to avoid domestic economic collapse.⁸⁸ Additionally, during much of the war, Hitler avoided diverting needed resources to the military in order to ensure quality of life for the civilian population and thereby maintain his own popular support.⁸⁹ Though German industry did manage to increase production to begin catching up to wartime demands, by the time it did so battlefield personnel losses and the increasing allied bombing campaign had irreversibly reduced the Army's ability to maintain the mobile, offensive campaigns of earlier years.⁹⁰ Regardless of the wisdom of Germany's attack on the USSR in 1941, Hitler's declaration of war against the US later that year confronted Germany with a multi-front war against two nations who both possessed latent power exceeding what Germany could muster. Not able to knock either the US or the USSR out of the

war quickly, these strategic mistakes placed the German Army in exactly the type of long war it had sought to avoid throughout its history.

Finally, the German Army suffered from other weaknesses that affected it at the operational and tactical levels; these weaknesses were clearly evident in planning for Operation Barbarossa. First, the lack of logistics preparation slowed operations and limited success against the USSR.⁹¹ Second, intelligence lapses created an underestimation of the Soviet Army's size, weaponry, leadership, and resolve.⁹² Both of these failures have been attributed to a general inclination in the Army to focus on combat operations at the neglect of supporting functions such as logistics and intelligence, and a willful ignoring of identified problems due to an assumption of quick victory like those over Poland and France.⁹³ The latter of those explanations points to another potential problem for the German Army; that is, it grew overconfident in the face of its recognized capability, and was therefore prone to dangerous underestimation of its opponents.

Applicable Lessons and Recommendations

This broad overview of the development of the German Army presents several considerations for the US Army. First, the US Army must continue to make a conscious effort to develop and maintain a command environment that instills trust, responsibility, and initiative. The US Army long ago implemented mission command as a command philosophy. Even so, each new generation of commanders must work to balance their own responsibilities for mission accomplishment with the benefits and pitfalls of empowering their subordinates. In fact, accepting the risk inherent in allowing subordinates the flexibility to create and pursue their own, unique ways to carry out their tasks can lead to greater overall unit success. Further, as technology advances a commander's ability to maintain real-time awareness of his forces and

contact with subordinates, he must resist the impulse to needlessly interject himself in those subordinates' activities so as to avoid stifling their initiative and growth as leaders.

Beyond just creating the right environment, the Army must continue to adapt methods for developing leaders. Commanders should leverage technology to increase the use of wargames at much lower levels to exercise their staffs and subordinate commanders. The Army could encourage a more robust mentorship program to develop officers throughout their careers and potentially contribute to increases in cohesion across the officer corps. One way to promote cohesion and leader education would be to increase resident seats for professional military education and limit the options for officers of all components to attend via distance learning; waivers to attending resident schools should be rare. This does not mean overall selection standards should be lowered; rather more stringent requirements for resident attendance should be explored as a method to standardize and ensure the quality of the education received by those selected.

Additionally, the Army should continue to build organizational strengths that increase cohesion and integration of capabilities. Continued development of partnership programs across the total force, such as the Total Force Partnership Program, Associated Units, and Regionally Aligned Forces must be synchronized and resourced to reduce competition for units' time, minimize confusion over support relationships, and enhance cohesion between affiliated units. The Army Reserve Engagement Cell/Team program serves as a powerful tool for integrating USAR support into Combatant Command operations; the Army might explore ways to grow that program to better synchronize partnerships and further cooperation across the total force. Additionally, though the Army does not have a General Staff in the German model, it should maintain and improve utilization of the School of Advanced Military Studies and Basic Strategic

Arts Program graduate Functional Area 59 (Strategist) officers. Potential improvement areas might include increasing the numbers of school seats across components, reevaluating where these officers should serve, and providing better incentives such as improved promotion and command opportunities.

Finally, as the German example demonstrates, armies need to ensure they are attending to the inner needs of their soldiers. Just as moral failures in the German high command and the spread of Nazi ideology throughout the force had a terrible effect on the *Heer*, today's soldiers can be susceptible to wrong motivations and improper ethical standards that can harm them and the Army. This is not to argue for indoctrinating soldiers with the beliefs of any particular political party or faith system; however, it is important that they are firmly grounded in the values and motivated by the ideals held by the Army and the nation they serve. While it is true that the *Heer* had chaplains, it is also apparent that they were not employed sufficiently to meet the spiritual needs of the German soldiers; rather Nazi ideology filled the void. The US Army does not promote religion, but it should allow the chaplains it has to focus on their primary purpose of ministering spiritually to soldiers; they should not be limited in their lawful religious duties, nor should they be relegated to additional duty officers to provide briefings or to run special programs at the commander's leisure. Additionally, the Army overall, and unit leaders in particular, should make honest efforts to instill a sense of patriotism, organizational pride, and unit pride in their soldiers. Helping them understand that they are part of a larger, important organization serving a great nation might just provide the motivation one of them needs to accomplish a difficult mission or choose the honorable path. Finally, the Army must continue to execute programs and encourage soldiers to conduct outreach to local communities. The military has much to offer the civilian population, whether it be unit assistance at local events and

projects, or individual soldiers using their skills and leadership abilities to help local organizations. Likewise, the Army benefits greatly from the support and goodwill of its civilian neighbors. With the declining number of Americans who have served in the military, it is critical that the Army work to maintain strong links to the people it defends.

The army Germany fielded at the beginning of World War II was an effective but imperfect force. It is worth taking the time to examine what made the *Heer* so effective; it is equally important to understand its shortcomings. Certainly the US today differs from World War II Germany such that any direct correlation between the two armies is counterproductive. However the US should learn what it can from such a powerful fighting force to avoid “reinventing the wheel” or making similar mistakes as we seek to maintain and improve our own military. Exploring the strengths of the *Heer*’s command principles, leader development process, and organization might demonstrate ways the US Army can improve its capability to operate across multiple domains in an increasingly dynamic environment. At the same time the *Heer*’s failures should serve as powerful reminders of the importance of developing ethical behavior, strategic thinking, joint coordination, logistics and intelligence proficiency, and appropriate forms of motivating today’s soldiers.

¹ Tim Travers, “The Allied Victories, 1918,” in Hew Strachan, ed. *The Oxford Illustrated History of the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 286-288.

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³ Ibid., 281.

⁴ Robert M. Citino, *Quest for Decisive Victory: From Stalemate to Blitzkrieg in Europe, 1899-1940* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002), xvii.

⁵ Gerhard P. Gross, *The Myth and Reality of German Warfare: Operational Thinking from Moltke the Elder to Heusinger* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2016), 17-25.

⁶ Williamson Murray, *German Military Effectiveness* (Baltimore, MD: The Nautical & Aviation Publishing Company of America, Inc., 1992), 3.

⁷ Ibid.

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- ⁸ Gerhard P. Gross, *The Myth and Reality of German Warfare*, 19.
- ⁹ Ibid., 20.
- ¹⁰ R. R. Palmer, "Frederick the Great, Guibert, Bülow: From Dynastic to National War," in *Makers of Modern Strategy: from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 96.
- ¹¹ Ibid., 96-103.
- ¹² Robert M. Citino, *Quest for Decisive Victory*, 3-4.
- ¹³ Eitan Shamir, *Transforming Command: The Pursuit of Mission Command in the U.S., British, and Israeli Armies* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 33, 36.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., 34-35.
- ¹⁵ Robert M. Citino, *Quest for Decisive Victory*, 19.
- ¹⁶ Gerhard P. Gross, *The Myth and Reality of German Warfare*, 36-37.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., 38-39.
- ¹⁸ Robert M. Citino, *Quest for Decisive Victory*, 20.
- ¹⁹ Hajo Holborn, "The Prusso-German School: Moltke and the Rise of the General Staff," in *Makers of Modern Strategy: from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 286.
- ²⁰ Gerhard P. Gross, *The Myth and Reality of German Warfare*, 84.
- ²¹ Samuel R. Williamson, Jr., "The Origins of the War," in Hew Strachan, ed. *The Oxford Illustrated History of the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 23.
- ²² Robert M. Citino, *Quest for Decisive Victory*, 167.
- ²³ Ibid., 169.
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Gerhard P. Gross, *The Myth and Reality of German Warfare*, 140.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Robert M. Citino, *The Path to Blitzkrieg*, 44.
- ²⁸ Ibid., 9-10.
- ²⁹ Geoffrey P. Megargee, *Inside Hitler's High Command* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 3.
- ³⁰ Robert M. Citino, *The Path to Blitzkrieg*, 12, 120-121, 201-202; Richard R. Muller, "Close Air Support: The German, British, and American experiences, 1918-1941," in *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period*, ed. Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millet (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 158.
- ³¹ Robert M. Citino, *The Path to Blitzkrieg*, 145.
- ³² Ibid., 195.
- ³³ Robert M. Citino, *Quest for Decisive Victory*, 196-208.
- ³⁴ Ibid., 195.
- ³⁵ Ibid., 185, 195.
- ³⁶ Robert M. Citino, *The Path to Blitzkrieg*, 223-227.
- ³⁷ Williamson Murray, *German Military Effectiveness*, 22.
- ³⁸ Robert M. Citino, *The Path to Blitzkrieg*, 232.

³⁹ Robert M. Citino, *Quest for Decisive Victory*, 195, 210, 213.

⁴⁰ Eitan Shamir, *Transforming Command*, 3.

⁴¹ Martin van Creveld, *Fighting Power: German and U.S. Army Performance, 1939-1945* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), 35-37.

⁴² Jörg Muth, *Command Culture: Officer Education in the U.S. Army and the German Armed Forces, 1901-1940, and the Consequences for World War II* (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 2011), 173.

⁴³ Gerhard P. Gross, *The Myth and Reality of German Warfare*, 38.

⁴⁴ Martin van Creveld, *Fighting Power*, 165.

⁴⁵ Martin van Creveld, *Fighting Power*, 18-19; Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front, 1941-45, German Troops and the Barbarisation of Warfare* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 56.

⁴⁶ Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front*, 40, 74; Martin van Creveld, *Fighting Power*, 124.

⁴⁷ Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front*, 90.

⁴⁸ Martin van Creveld, *Fighting Power*, 127-129.

⁴⁹ Jörg Muth, *Command Culture*, 98.

⁵⁰ Martin van Creveld, *Fighting Power*, 143-144.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 133-135, 137-138.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 138-139.

⁵³ Jörg Muth, *Command Culture*, 87-89.

⁵⁴ Robert M. Citino, *The Path to Blitzkrieg*, 212.

⁵⁵ Jörg Muth, *Command Culture*, 193.

⁵⁶ Gerhard P. Gross, *The Myth and Reality of German Warfare*, 39.

⁵⁷ Robert M. Citino, *The Path to Blitzkrieg*, 232.

⁵⁸ Jörg Muth, *Command Culture*, 151.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 192.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 128, 192.

⁶² Williamson Murray, *German Military Effectiveness*, 198.

⁶³ Jörg Muth, *Command Culture*, 162, 190.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 162-166.

⁶⁵ Robert M. Citino, *The Path to Blitzkrieg*, 89-90, 105-106.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 106, 109, 120, 134.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 106-109.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 105-106, 109-111.

⁷⁰ Robert M. Citino, *Quest for Decisive Victory*, 202; Robert M. Citino, *The Path to Blitzkrieg*, 173.

⁷¹ Williamson Murray, *German Military Effectiveness*, 229-239.

⁷² Geoffrey P. Megargee, *Inside Hitler's High Command*, 58-60.

⁷³ Martin van Creveld, *Fighting Power*, 146-149.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 146-147.

⁷⁵ Geoffrey P. Megargee, *Inside Hitler's High Command*, 9-10.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁷⁹ Martin van Creveld, *Fighting Power*, 45.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 43-44, 75-76.

⁸¹ Geoffrey P. Megargee, *Inside Hitler's High Command*, 29.

⁸² Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front*, 63-67.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 74-76.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁸⁶ Geoffrey P. Megargee, *Inside Hitler's High Command*, 126.

⁸⁷ Manfred Messerschmidt, "German Military Effectiveness Between 1919 and 1939," in *Military Effectiveness Volume 2: The Interwar Period New Edition*, ed. Allan R. Millet and Williamson Murray (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 223-224.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 225-227, 235.

⁸⁹ Jürgen E. Förster, "The Dynamics of Volksgemeinschaft: The Effectiveness of the German Military Establishment in the Second World War," in *Military Effectiveness Volume 3: The Second World War New Edition*, ed. Allan R. Millet and Williamson Murray (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 212-213.

⁹⁰ Richard Overy, *Why the Allies Won* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1995), 129-133, 203-207.

⁹¹ Jürgen E. Förster, "The Dynamics of Volksgemeinschaft," 201-203.

⁹² Geoffrey P. Megargee, *Inside Hitler's High Command*, 112-114.

⁹³ Gerhard P. Gross, *The Myth and Reality of German Warfare*, 214-216.

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